

HOW TO TELL YOUR STORY



A 10-Step Guide

New Revised Second Edition

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How to Tell Your Story in Video

A 10-STEP GUIDE

There was a time, not all that long ago, when communication among people involved nothing more complex than telling stories around the campfire. As families and tribes, we came together after a long day of hunting woolly mammoth or gathering acorns and berries.

People listened then.

Today's audiences are not listeners. They are sophisticated consumers of media. They are easily distracted. They tune in and out at will.

Human communication advanced from the campfire to parchment, and then to the printing press. In the last 150 years, the art and science of communication leapt from paper to film, tape, and electrons.

As a species, we've always been both verbal and visual communicators. The earliest known written language dates back 5,000 years and the Chauvet cave paintings in southern France are 32,000 years old.

Fast forward.

In the second half of the 20th century, television brought moving images into our homes, replacing the radio around which families sat at night. No longer was the experience of seeing a moving image restricted to the Saturday afternoon cinema. It became part of everyday life.

Today, we are more than the television generation. TV has been mainstream since about 1950. And, we're more than the MTV generation: the music network launched in 1981, and its fans are already in their second generation. We are even more than the video generation. Moving images are now

TODAY'S AUDIENCES ARE SOPHISTICATED CONSUMERS OF MEDIA.

everywhere, from our high-definition TV sets to our laptops, iPods® and cell phones – not to mention the LCD screens at the checkout counter and gas pump. We live and breathe video.

It's no wonder, then, that business has adopted video communications in a big way.



It is used to introduce and sell new products and services; to tell the corporate story; to train employees; and to speak to shareholders. Video is an essential component of trade shows, dealer meetings, consumer marketing initiatives, and press events. And it is often a key component of internal communications.

In just the few short years since we published the first edition of this eBook, video has become part of the online experience in a big way: Webcasts, podcasts, Web films, corporate Web videos, intranet and extranet video communications. We are now the online video generation.

We are intimately familiar with this because it is our business. Our company, Frame Productions, Inc., is an award-winning content development and video production company with a long list of clients, large and small. We've pioneered business webcasting, developed video training initiatives, produced all manner of marketing videos and created corporate documentaries.

Every company and organization knows that they need to use video to communicate with their customers, employees, investors and other stakeholders, but not everyone knows how to go about it or how to get the best product. In our years of working with a variety of clients, we've seen the good, the bad and the ugly. Sometimes when a new client shows us a tape of "what we did last time," we just cringe. The range of sins includes poor production values, bad storytelling, confused messages, ineffective use of the medium, and lack of respect for the audience. Those are just the big sins.

But, rather than tell you what's wrong with a lot of corporate video, we'd rather tell you how to do it right. How to get your money's worth. And how to make sure you communicate what you want to communicate, to the audience you want to reach, in a way that will get and keep their attention.

Because we are all sophisticated consumers of media, our expectations are already high whenever we sit down in front of a screen or monitor. Our audiences speak a complex visual language. They know what's real and what's not real. They expect a high degree of visual stimulus. And they are, as T.S. Eliot once wrote, "driven to distraction by distraction."

So, let's start our 10-Step Guide right there, with the most important link in the chain of communications: your audience.

I. KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

You and me – we’re different. So is everyone else on the planet. Age, gender, culture, environment, and childhood experiences all come together to shape unique, individual perspectives on the world around us. While we can’t yet tailor video productions to each individual, we often do target highly defined and sometimes niche audiences. To communicate better, we can begin by taking note of broad categories to understand how the differences among us will affect the way our viewers may perceive the show we’re producing.

Age differences are perhaps the simplest to understand. Baby boomer and older audiences grew up in a less visual and more linear world. Younger audiences became adapted to a more dynamic visual environment. They live in a non-linear world, bouncing around Web pages and surfing from link to link.

Imagine a 20-year-old video gamer sitting in front of a 15-minute instructional video with a monotone narrator, elevator music and no visual effects. How long do you think you can hold that viewer?

Age is not the only factor. Psychologists have identified gender-based and culture-based differences in communication styles. According to Marcelle E. DuPraw and

Marya Axner (“Working on Common Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges”), “Our culture influences how we approach problems, and how we participate in groups and communities.”

We will talk more about diversity and how that applies to your video in section six, but as a start, determine if your audience will be mostly of a similar age or gender, and whether they share a similar cultural background or are coming from many different backgrounds. On a very practical but important level, your audience may determine whether you need to produce a bilingual or multilingual show, and whether you need to introduce closed captioning to reach those with hearing impairment.

Is your intended audience highly targeted, such as heart surgeons or landscape designers?

KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE TELLS YOU THEIR MOTIVATION FOR VIEWING YOUR VIDEO AND THEIR EXPECTED INTEREST LEVEL.

If, for example, your audience members are all automotive engineers, you can use a language and frame of reference that would not be appropriate and probably not be understood with a more general audience. However, if the same video will also be shown to a more general audience, the script has to

accommodate their level of understanding as well. Better yet, create an alternate version for each of your audiences.

Your audience also tells you a great deal about their motivation for viewing your video and their expected interest level. A group of investors will have a high degree of interest in learning how your company is doing

and how your audience will view your show is another key element that has to go into the planning process.

Most online viewers, whether at home or at work, now have access to fairly robust broadband connections. That means we can deliver high quality video with lots of action, animation and effects. However, the average laptop or desktop computer speakers leave a lot to be desired, especially when compared with the studio sound monitors that may be used during post-production.

The sound engineer has to take that into account.

On the other end of the scale, your video may be designed for a large dealer, sales or shareholder meeting where it will be shown on high-definition monitors or a theater screen. This setting demands greater production value and more intensive sound design.

Distribution method has taken on added importance. Online distribution

CONSIDER THE VIEWING ENVIRONMENT AND POTENTIAL DISTRIBUTION METHODS WHEN PLANNING YOUR PROJECT.

financially, while a video explaining new paperwork procedures to your employees will have a hard time keeping their interest.

One of our clients is an \$80 billion telecommunications company, and our videos are used to train their retail sales and customer service representatives. These employees undergo a great deal of training in-classroom, in-store, via the Web and with self-learning materials. They are barraged with new products and programs. Working with our client, we identified their primary motivator: learning what will help them sell more and earn a higher income. We tailor our videos to appeal to this primary motivator, and that keeps them interested.

This audience views our videos in a variety of ways: online, on a TV screen in a classroom setting, or by taking home a DVD. Where



is now commonplace. Businesses place videos on their Web sites, on YouTube and other content sites. They deliver Webcasts, Webinars, and podcasts. These distribution methods offer the benefit of lower cost and faster turnaround time. Programs can air live, or be shot, edited and broadcast within hours. Today, every business, large or small, needs video on its Web site and as part of its communication strategy.

You may also have a need for providing the program on DVD for trade shows, retail environments or home viewing. If your distribution is multi-channel, that may require re-editing or re-purposing the video program. For example, a 20-minute technical or sales video may be played straight through when used in a classroom or presentation, but that length is challenging for an online audience. Online viewers are also answering emails and phone calls, watching the kids or being called into meetings.

All of these factors – the composition of your audience, their motivation for viewing your video, the method for viewing and how it will be distributed – affect not only how you plan and script the show, but also your budget and timeline. That's why the first step to a better corporate video production is to know your audience.

2. SET YOUR GOALS

Sometimes, video has become such an

accepted part of some aspect of a company's business – launching a new product, for example – that little thought is given to the purpose and objectives of the video. When the next new Widget is ready to be introduced, the call just goes out, "Do a new video." And sometimes, when a video production is clearly the best way to communicate, managers may reject the idea in the belief that it will be too costly or too time-consuming.

In every production, from the smallest corporate project to the most star-studded Hollywood film, there are choices and trade-offs that allow for different approaches and different budgets. We will discuss budgeting later on, but don't dismiss the concept of video even if your resources (time or money) are limited.

Start by setting your goals. What is the real purpose of the video you want to produce? Is it to inform, sell, persuade, instruct or recruit? What do you want the audience to take away from the video? What do you want them to do with the information?

Be clear about the answers to these questions. Don't write them in jargon, legalese or business-speak. "Increase awareness of our corporate value system as it applies to the responsibility of all our associates to establish firm patterns of respect for the company's property." That's not good direction to give your production company. Just say, "Tell our

employees why they shouldn't steal."

Many years ago, when I was fresh out of college and working in an Alfa Romeo dealership in New York City, the CEO of the company came to the United States and met with many of the dealers and sales reps. He came up to me, shook my hand, and said two words: "Sell Alfas." I walked away with a very clear idea of what he wanted from me.

If you want to "sell Alfas," tell your creative team and your production company.

Several years ago, we produced the consumer, dealer, press conference and public affairs videos for a large Japanese automaker that was introducing the first hybrid-electric vehicle to be sold in the United States. While the apparent and immediate goal for these video productions was to introduce the car, the real purpose was to make a statement enhancing the company's environmental image. Knowing that, our decisions with regard to scripts, visuals, distribution methods and multipurposing of the videos were more on-target and more effective.

But, if all you want your video to do is "sell Alfas," just say so.

3. FOCUS YOUR MESSAGE

Video does a great job of compacting information. You can communicate a great

deal more in a seven-minute video than a 20-minute speech. We actually proved this with one client, weaning them away from long-winded PowerPoint presentations by company engineers.

But even the inherent advantages of video – visual and audio reinforcement, scripted communication and high-energy delivery

TO CHANNEL THE ATTENTION OF YOUR AUDIENCE, START BY DEVELOPING A CENTRAL THEME.

– can be wasted when your message isn't focused.

Trying to communicate too much, or adding too much extraneous information, will dilute the power of your video production.

In "The Attention Economy," the authors remind us that, "Any company process, customer interface, or market relationship becomes more effective through the careful channeling of attention." Your goal, with your video, is to carefully channel your audience's attention.

That's not easy in a world of information overload and message clutter. According to The New York Times, American adults are in front of screens – television, computer, cell phone – an average of 8.5 hours a day. They are exposed to 61 minutes of TV commercials and promos. Estimates vary widely, but

in total, we may be seeing anywhere from hundreds to thousands of advertisements and brand images each day. Just look around you right now – how many logos can you count?

To channel the attention of your audience, start by developing a central theme. And make that theme relevant to your audience: not, “The first electric widget”; but, “How the first electric widget will revolutionize health care.”

From your central theme, develop major subheads. Keep them few in number, and group them along a logical line: product features, a chronology, relationship to each other, or whatever method of organization works best for your story.

Then, within those subheads, list the key messages and information points you want to communicate.

Organizing your information in this way will help you set priorities for the video. It will help you eliminate extraneous information, by allowing you to see what fits and what doesn't fit under your theme umbrella.

Most importantly, it will help you develop your story.

Getting and keeping your viewer's attention is one thing; getting them to remember what you've shown them is another. Organizing your information helps retention as well.

“It is currently thought that the information in our long-term memory

is stored in interconnected networks called knowledge structures,” states Barak Rosenshine of the University of Illinois at Urbana in “Advances in Research on Instruction.” “Therefore, the research suggests that it is important for teachers to help students organize the new material... One way to do this is to provide students with ‘graphic organizers,’ that is, organizing structures for expository material.”

After spending all that money on your video production, you want your audience to remember what you showed them, right? So: organize.

4. TELL A STORY

The best way to organize the material for your audience is to give them a structure they learned as toddlers: tell them a story.

Every story has a beginning, middle and end. It has a plot, characters and action. You probably learned the basics of story writing in high school English class. Dust the cobwebs of memory away and find your story.

If you sat down in a movie theater, and were shown a random series of events while a disembodied narrator droned on for two hours, you'd surely leave and ask for your money back. But we've seen far too many corporate videos that torture their audience with little more than that.

Every video – let me repeat that, every video – will benefit from storytelling. Short,

long, technical or non-technical, it will benefit from storytelling. Even thirty-second television commercials, certainly the best of them, tell a story (watch for it).

You will engage your audience by telling them a story. It can be subtle. It can be told visually, with graphics and footage. It may or may not use actors, real people or a voiceover. Each project will demand a different approach.

When you tell a story, you are adding to the entertainment value of your video. Information presented as entertainment will be better received and better retained. Before the 1997 movie came out, all that most people could tell you about the Titanic was that it was a big ship that sank. “The Aviator” told us about Howard Hughes’ life; “Band of Brothers” brought the story of D-Day home for a new generation.

In one project that introduced a new SUV a few years ago, we used real people in various locations to show “a day in the life” of the vehicle. There was no voiceover or dialog, but within that plot device, we were able to showcase all of the key features of the product while providing pacing and involving viewers in the story.

5. TELL IT WITH PEOPLE

Another reason that project worked is that we told the story through people, in this case, the supposed owners of the vehicle



(which also subtly told the audience which demographic the product was aimed at).

Go home and channel surf tonight. About 90% of the time, you’ll see a human face as you land on each channel. As social animals, we respond to other humans and we get more than 90% of our communication through non-verbal messages.

Far too many corporate videos, especially product and technical videos, ignore this very basic human fact altogether. They make the product the star. Usually, that’s because the people closest to it – the designers, R&D engineers and marketing executives – can empathize with the product. They’ve lived with it as it was being conceived, developed and brought to life. But their audience hasn’t. And they won’t be able to empathize with your product in the way they can empathize with the people who might use it, and the people who created it.

Wherever possible, we recommend putting people in your video. They can be actors or they may be real customers or employees. Your audience will empathize with

your characters, because empathy is the glue that binds us socially. We can't help it.

We have used this empathy reflex effectively in many productions, most notably in a series of training videos. In these videos, we employ actors to portray customer interactions. We often show both the "right way" and the "wrong way" – but never in a manner that allows the audience to distance themselves from the character. For example, the sales representative may be shown as the "new guy," learning from a more experienced "employee." Everyone in the audience was once the "new guy," so they can empathize with his or her plight, and learn from it in a positive manner.

The evidence is that these training videos result in retained learning. Store employees and phone reps essentially "replay" the interaction they've seen when confronted with a real-world situation that approximates the scene they've previously watched.

In other projects, we tell the client's story with real people: executives, employees, customers, or all three. Viewers respond to the authenticity that these non-actors deliver on screen. The key in conducting interviews with these on-screen guests is to ask the right questions the right way.

For us as human beings to connect with each other, even with characters on a screen, we have to see a part of ourselves in the other person. That's why:

6. DIVERSITY IS BEAUTIFUL

An increasingly diverse America allows us to learn from each other and makes us all stronger. "Learning about people's cultures has the potential to give us a mirror image of our own. We have the opportunity to challenge our assumptions about the 'right' way of doing things, and consider a variety of approaches," state DuPraw and Axner.

Yet, we still see far too many corporate videos and commercials that fail to reflect this diversity. Even companies with diversity programs and diversity supplier initiatives may forget diversity in their casting.

When you portray people in your productions – as you've already learned you should from step number five – be inclusive of all Americans. And remember that not everyone in America is a supermodel. Your audience will respond better to a cast that is reflective of their daily experience, rather than a cast reflective of "The Donna Reed Show."

7. APPEAL TO INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES

Recognizing diversity in people also allows us to recognize diversity in our learning styles. Some of these differences are cultural: "Notable differences occur among cultural groups when it comes to epistemologies — that is, the ways people come to know things (Axner and DuPraw)."

Other aspects that distinguish our individual learning styles are unrelated to

culture. They are tied to our genes and our upbringing. Researchers have studied this and created a variety of ways to look at these differences. The most common is known as the VAK learning styles. That stands for vision-auditory-kinesthetic, categories that describe different ways in which we each receive and resolve information.

For the purpose of our discussion here, we are concerned primarily with vision and sound. In specific situations, such as classroom training, video can aid kinesthetic learning by providing a starting point for study or role-playing. But what concerns us most in designing a business video production is how to appeal to both visual and verbal learners.

“Visual learners remember best what they see — pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, and demonstrations,” writes Richard M. Felder of North Carolina State University. “Verbal learners get more out of

this. You will see the news (the burning building or car crash) while you hear the news anchor describe it, followed by seeing the people affected while you hear them being interviewed, at the same time you will commonly see their names or other text on screen adding to or reinforcing the information.

Take your cue from the news. Like you, news producers have to communicate complex information in a tight time frame. Most news stories don’t run longer than two minutes. You may have a longer video, but it shouldn’t be any longer than necessary, and you probably have a great deal of important information to get across.

Help your audience grasp this information and remember it better with a liberal dose of graphics. These graphics can be charts, maps, diagrams or tables – better if they can be animated. Graphics can also be text: short headlines, brief bullet points, scrolls or crawls. Keep them animated as well. A static screen is a dead screen.

Not only will these techniques appeal to your viewers’ individual learning styles, they will add to the visual stimulus necessary to keep your audience engaged. Because the surest way to keep the attention of an easily distracted audience is by distracting them.

THE BEST WAY TO KEEP YOUR AUDIENCE FROM GETTING DISTRACTED IS BY DISTRACTING THEM.

words — written and spoken explanations. Everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally,”

Video supports both learning styles in a very rich way. Watch any of the cable news networks or your local broadcast news this evening, and you will appreciate



8. DISTRACT YOUR AUDIENCE

Whether it is an epidemic of attention-deficit disorder or just that we're all way too busy, being easily distracted seems to be a condition of modern life. There are shiny toys and exciting things all around us, and like little children, our interest wanders from our computer to our cell phone to the conversation in the next cubicle.

The environment in which your video will be viewed is often conducive to distraction. At a trade show, there are dancers in the next booth, people bumping into you, others talking nearby and the din of the convention hall assaulting you. In a conference room,

you're checking your BlackBerry® while thinking about your next meeting, the report that's due, and the ten voice messages and twenty emails you have to respond to. So, if the video you are supposed to be watching allows your mind to wander, it will.

Don't fool yourself into believing that the material you put into your video is engrossing enough to keep the attention of your audience. It isn't. If any material could be that engrossing, we wouldn't be munching popcorn in the movie theater or surfing the Web while watching TV.

It may seem counterintuitive, but the best way to keep your audience from getting distracted is by distracting them. The authors of "The Attention Economy" state it this way: "Evidence shows that attention getting is most effective when the field has other distracters, and that directed attention has no benefit when only one stimulus is presented within a visual field."

In fact, new scientific evidence shows that our brains have to be constantly active. It's part of our basic biology, a need to be engaged with the outside world for survival.

We recommend a visually stimulating approach, which may include a combination of graphics, visual effects, quick cuts, and animated transitions. Aural stimulation is also helpful and can be accomplished with attention to a complete sound design process, including music, enhanced voice tracks and

sound effects. Refreshing changes in look also tell the viewer that something new is happening and restores their attention.

Not every project needs to be a high-energy music video, but it shouldn't look like a 1950s-era high school filmstrip, either. Contemporary documentaries and films have adopted the visual language of MTV. Reality shows bring the viewer close to the action with handheld cameras. Sports programming puts the audience in the game or on the racetrack with helmet cams and in-car cameras. Introducing some of these elements into your corporate productions will improve pacing and add visual stimulus. Each project deserves its own creative approach — one that is correct for the project and the budget — but no production should ignore the need to keep the audience from distraction by distracting them.

9. SAY IT AGAIN, SAM

We all remember learning our ABCs by repeating the alphabet, sing-song fashion, over and over again. Repetition is one of the keys of successful learning.

We are blessed with both short-term memory and long-term memory. Short-term memory is like our desktop: it contains several items that are important to us at the current time. Once that moment has passed, those items will either go into the file drawer of long-term memory or go into

the wastebasket. Since the purpose of your corporate video is not only to communicate something which you consider important enough to spend a good chunk of money on, it also stands to reason that you want your audience to remember what you told them. To put it in their file drawer.

So, how can you avoid having that information go into the wastebasket of their mind?

We have already discussed a number of techniques that aid memory retention, including organizing of information (step 3), telling a story (step 4), using people in your productions (step 5) and appealing to individual learning styles (step 7). Now, let's see how to use repetition to help cement long-term retention.

“Using multiple forms of review also enhances long-term memory,” according to Ruth Palombo Weiss writing in *Training and Development* (October 2000). Professional trainer Doug Smith recommends, “Repetition is critical. Important material should be delivered/practiced at least 5 times in at least 3 different ways. The more important the material, the more it should be covered.”

Your video doesn't have to be used in training to apply these principles. If your CEO is communicating a critical message to employees, or your sales department is telling the sales staff about the key features of a new product, or your corporate communications

department is educating journalists about the community initiatives of your company, you want the viewer to remember what you showed them.

It's an accepted practice to, first, tell your audience what you are going to tell them; then tell them; and then recap what you've told them. In a longer show, you may also need to introduce stop points along the way: create segments within your video that summarize a previous section and introduce the next. This is another way of organizing the material to aid attention and retention.

Text and other graphics also repeat and reinforce the information that may be coming through a narrator, executive interview, on-camera host or the actors in a dialogue scene. When you both hear and see the new information you are receiving, your brain has a better chance at making those critical connections and pathways that will establish it in long-term memory.

production partner and how you work them will be among the most critical decisions of the entire process. Technically, most production companies have the capability of delivery a good show; and, given enough time and enough money, can produce almost anything you need. But, there's more to it than the bottom line.

It's important to understand the prospective production company's talents and experience. Don't just look for a company that's done something similar to what you have in mind, or that has worked in your industry: you may just get warmed-over ideas. A truly talented company will learn your business and your needs in quick-start finish, and should be able to demonstrate both creativity and understanding. They'll listen to you.

Sometimes, the worst way to secure a production company is to send out an RFP. What you are buying is a creative product, not a case of light bulbs. While you may want

competitive bids, unless you sit down with each potential production company, you give them no chance to understand your needs and you

give yourself no chance to understand their approach.

There are many ways to approach each project, and each approach involves trade-offs in time, money and final outcome.

THERE ARE MANY WAYS TO APPROACH EACH PROJECT, AND EACH APPROACH INVOLVES TRADE-OFFS IN TIME, MONEY AND OUTCOME.

10. THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THE BOTTOM LINE

Whether you are seeking new ideas, a new production company or just reinvigorating your current relationships, choosing your

First, take the time to sit down with your production company, or the companies you would like to get proposals from. Since most companies are technically proficient, the chemistry between you and their creative and production team carries more weight. You want to hear new and original ideas, but you also want a company that will listen to you and with whom you can get creatively in sync.

A chance to sit down with you allows the production team to ask questions and discuss options. By understanding your priorities, in terms of message delivery, budget, and time frame, they will be able to give you a proposal that better meets your needs. And, you will find yourself more likely to be comparing apples to apples when looking at different proposals.

Our proposals always include a creative treatment, as well as detailed descriptions of each stage of the project: pre-production, production and post-production. We'll also provide a realistic and detailed timeline along with a budget. You should expect no less from any production company that seeks your business.

It is common today to agree on a fixed-cost budget. That gives the buyer a known, up-front cost with no surprises. For the production company, it allows them to know their income and profit from the job and to schedule resources more effectively. Such agreements need to be clear, however, on how

to handle changes, what constitutes a major change, and the amount of revisions that can be accommodated.

Some companies prefer a time-and-cost budget. That works fine, too, as long as the buyer knows that the final cost won't be known until the invoice comes in, and that every change or revision along the way adds time, and therefore, cost.

Whichever way works best for you and your company, give yourself and your production partner a chance to produce the best project possible by engaging in an open and frank discussion right at the beginning.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

We're not lawyers and we're not CPAs, but we have seen clients run into trouble because of issues they may not be aware of when choosing a production company. This is a business with a low barrier to entry: anyone can go out and buy a camcorder and call themselves a production company. There's a lot more to it than that, and there are situations that can enmesh you as the client in financial and even legal troubles.

Here are a few things to look out for:

Business Status. Be sure your vendor is a legitimate business, either incorporated or operating with a DBA, and possessing a current business license.

Financial Stability. You want to know that your vendor can handle the job and that they will be around later when you need changes, revisions or have a future project. How long have they been in business? Are they listed in Dun & Bradstreet? Have you checked their client references?

Insurance. On set, there are many hazards, from cables that people can trip over to heavy lights that can fall on someone. Some shoots have even greater hazards: driving, pyrotechnics, etc. Any legitimate production company will maintain a commercial liability policy of at least one million dollars, and can provide an insurance certificate naming your company as an additional insured if you request it. In our industry, the standard is a DICE (Documentary-Industrial-Commercial-Educational) Production Package, which will include both property and casualty coverage.

Film Permits. Most communities require film permits, and they cost money – anywhere from a hundred dollars to perhaps thousands of dollars. It's tempting for a production company to lowball their bid by not including permit costs and hoping to get away without being caught, but if they are, your production will be shut down on the spot by the authorities. Make sure you understand whether a permit is required and whether

your production company has obtained one.

Unemployment Insurance and Worker's Comp. In most cases, crews and talent (the actors) are considered employees, and must be on payroll and covered by unemployment insurance and worker's compensation coverage. Because that increases costs, it's another area where some production companies try to cut corners – but it can come back to bite you.

Talent Clearances. Any person who appears in your production, whether a professional actor or “person on the street,” has rights to his or her image. Professional cast are generally hired under a clearance agreement that runs from one to three years. Non-paid talent (your customers and others who may appear in your video) generally require a signed talent release or clear notification that they are being filmed and their image may be used for commercial purposes. Your employees may be exempt (check with your HR department), but there may also be issues if an employee leaves. At the very least, in that case, you may want to go back to your production company to re-edit the video to replace or remove that employee. (Which brings us back to financial stability: will they be around?)

Music and Footage Rights. It's tempting

to use that popular U2 song or to pull a television or movie clip from the Internet, but you'll be violating copyrights and could wind up at the wrong end of a lawsuit. Don't ask your production company to do anything illegal, and question any music or footage they provide, particularly if it is a recognizable song or includes celebrity images.

How important are these considerations? Courts have held that in cases where the vendor's bid is so low that they could not provide the service without losing money or failing to meet legal and payroll requirements, the client should reasonably have known that and therefore can be held jointly liable for claims arising out of the contractor's need to cut corners. So, don't put your company at risk: hire a production company that operates ethically, meets legal requirements, is financially stable and respects your reputation.

FOLLOW THE PROGRAM

In 21st century America, we live in a visual world. Moving images surround us. There is hardly an event that happens anywhere in the world that isn't recorded by a camera.

It's no wonder, then, that companies big and small know that they need to use video to effectively communicate with their employees, community, shareholders, suppliers, government officials, and members

of the media.

Despite the democratization of media – anyone can go to the electronics superstore and buy a high-quality camcorder for a few hundred dollars – video production is still a collaborative, creative and technically complex process. You may be able to edit the family vacation video on your iMac, but producing a professional video, correctly, safely, and appropriate to your message still requires time and money. Many studies have shown that viewers prefer professionally produced video to sloppy user-generated content. Your video is reflective of your company; make sure it reflects well on you.

Approach your next project following the ten steps we've just outlined, and you will enjoy a show that makes you proud, engages your audience, and allows them to understand and remember your message. ■

CHECKLIST:

10 Steps to Better Corporate Productions

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

- ☐ Age, gender, culture: diverse or similar?
- ☐ Do you need a bilingual or multilingual production?
- ☐ Do you need closed captioning for hearing-impaired audiences?
- ☐ How will the show be viewed: online, large or small TV monitor, portable media player, a variety of devices?
- ☐ Where will the show be viewed: home, office, boardroom, corporate theater?
- ☐ Will you need DVDs to distribute?
- ☐ How will you deliver the show online: company Web site, internal corporate site, YouTube, other content hosting platform?

SET YOUR GOALS

- ☐ What is the real purpose of your video production?
- ☐ What do you want your audience to take away from the show?
- ☐ What do you want them to do with the information?

FOCUS YOUR MESSAGE

- ☐ Develop a central theme.
- ☐ Develop major sub-sections, grouped and organized.
- ☐ Create key messages under each subhead.

TELL A STORY

- ☐ Write down your “plot” — the beginning, middle and end of the story.
- ☐ What elements will help you tell your story visually and verbally?

TELL IT WITH PEOPLE

- ☐ How can you personalize your product or other central theme with people?
- ☐ Who will be your cast of characters?

DIVERSITY IS BEAUTIFUL

- ☐ Does your cast (including employees, customers, etc.) reflect your audience?
- ☐ Have you been inclusive of appropriate age, gender, ethnic, cultural and racial backgrounds?

APPEAL TO INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES

- ☐ What graphics can you employ that will aid communications? (Text, charts, tables, animations, stills or footage.)
- ☐ Allow your viewers to both see and hear the message you want to deliver.
- ☐ Organize the information for your viewers.

DISTRACT YOUR AUDIENCE

- ☐ Employ a visually stimulating approach.
- ☐ Use a creative approach that is appropriate to the project, but one that keeps the audience engaged.

SAY IT AGAIN, SAM

- ☐ Introduce the topic, explain the topic, and summarize the topic.
- ☐ Introduce stop and review points if appropriate.
- ☐ Use text and graphics to reinforce narration.

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN THE BOTTOM LINE

- ☐ Meet with your production partner or potential partners before asking for a proposal.
- ☐ Openly discuss creative approaches, budget constraints and time constraints.

- ☐ Choose a production partner that you feel understands your needs and will also provide honest creative and budget input.
- ☐ Get a detailed proposal.
- ☐ Decide if you want a flat-fee or time-and-cost arrangement.

LEGAL AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Be sure your production partner can answer your questions regarding:

- ☐ Business status
- ☐ Financial stability
- ☐ Insurance
- ☐ Film Permits
- ☐ Unemployment and Worker's Comp Insurance
- ☐ Talent Clearances
- ☐ Music and Footage Rights

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

MEREDITH CRUSE

Meredith Cruse is the president and co-founder of Frame Productions, Inc. She is responsible for producing all of the company's projects, beginning with development and budgeting. Cruse and co-founder Dan Zukowski are co-creative directors on every project.

She has produced and directed corporate videos for Verizon Wireless, Honda, Mitsubishi, Coors, GCI Global, and Littler Mendelson. Meredith has also produced commercials for Ralphs, Food4Less, Vibram USA, ditech.com and the San Diego Zoo.

Prior to Frame Productions, Meredith was an independent producer who produced several independent feature films including the Sundance Film Festival entry, "I Love You...Don't Touch Me." Her previous work experience focused on development of feature films and television for a number of well-known Hollywood production companies including Todman-Simon and Morgan Creek.

Meredith was also Director of Development at Platinum Studios and ran this independent production company's development department with a first look deal with Dimension Films, a division of Miramax.

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DAN ZUKOWSKI

Dan Zukowski is the co-founder of Frame Productions, along with Meredith Cruse. A 25-year media industry professional, he has extensive experience in marketing communications, journalism, public relations and video/multimedia production.

Zukowski scripts the majority of the company's projects and is intimately involved in the post-production process, developing creative and design concepts and overseeing all post-production. He has written and produced numerous projects for Honda, Hyundai, Mitsubishi, Coors, Verizon Wireless, Littler Mendelson, Sony, Shell, Carlson Marketing, Kia and Kawasaki.

A former vice president with a large L.A.-based strategic communications agency, he understands corporate goals, business strategy and marketing, and has consulted for CEOs and high-level management teams.

Zukowski's byline has appeared in major daily newspapers and national magazines. He served as New York Editor for the Ward's family of automotive trade publications and has also served as senior editor of numerous corporate publications.

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